A SERMON

Preach'd before the Right Honourable

Sir *ROBERT CLAYTON*,

Lord Mayor

OF

LONDON,

AT

GUILD-HALL Chappel,

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PSAL. 119. v. 67.

Before I was afflicted I went aſtray; but now have I kept thy word.

THE Lot or Diſtribution of *Afflictions*, eſpecially on the *Good* and *Wiſe*, which by many of the *Heathens* was urged as a grand *argument* againſt *Providence*, and which ſerv'd to countenance either their *total denyal* of it, or their *Murmurings* againſt it, is now amongſt us *Chriſtians* made the great *conformation*, as of its *Exiſtence*, ſo of its *Juſtice* and *Goodneſs* too; ſince our Holy *Goſpel* has aſſur'd us, that *ſuffering* for *righteouſneſs ſake Martyrdom*, and the *ſcandal* of the *Croſs*, are promis'd, and **graciouſly appointed* for the *priviledge*, *triumph*, and *glory* of the *Heroical Chriſtian*. And albeit thoſe *ſeverer bleſſings*, which were ſo proper for the *Infancy* of the Church, requiring a moſt ſtrict *Diſcipline*, and glorious *Examples* for a ſtanding *Rule* and *Encouragement* to *Poſterity*; and which

* Phil. 1. 29.

were so remarkably verify'd in the immediate persecutions of the *Apostles*, and the succeeding Centuries of *Martyrs*: I say, albeit those more *rigorous mercies* seem'd now to have *expir'd* in these our days, since our Emperours are become *Christian*, and our Kings *nursing Fathers*; since *Credit* and *Security* are the *ornament* and *guard* of *Piety*, *Affluence* and *Honours* the *National* rewards of *Virtue* and *Religion*; yet notwithstanding all these *smooth Appearances*, these hopes and flatteries of a new Paradise, and a Triumphant Church, the Gospel must be fulfill'd, and * whosoever beareth not his *Cross*, cannot be a *true Disciple*, a true *follower* of *Christ*; but every person who has enter'd himself into the *Covenant* of *sufferings*, must with all humble resignation wait, and with patience undergo his * *predestination* to *Afflictions*.

* Luke 14. 27.

* Rom. 8. 29.

Now the *reason* and *justice* of this proceeding with *wise* and *virtuous* men, has continually tortur'd the enquiries of the *Learned* through all *times* and *Sects*, although with very different *events*; rendring the *Epicurean* careless and independant on *Providence*, the *Stoic* sententious and *witty*, but the true Christian *wise* and *humble*, who considers that the best man on earth is still a grievous *sinner*, and highly deserving

ſerving the ſevereſt *Temporal Afflictions*; that according to the *Law* of *rational nature*, the *wicked* are in a great meaſure, without the immediate interpoſals of *Omnipotence*, permitted the *freedom* of their *wills*, a dominion over their *ordinary actions*, and conſequently the *moleſtation* of others; who, with a pious confidence, expects a mighty recompence in the next world, at the *revelation* of *righteous judgment*; who glories to follow the * *Captain* of his *Salvation*, made *perfect* and conſecrated through *ſufferings*; and rejoyces with St. *Paul* to compleat and * fill up in his fleſh the remainders and relicks of Chriſts ſufferings, as if every Chriſtian were to be in ſome meaſure even *crucify'd* for *himſelf*.

* Heb. 2. 10.

*Col. 1. 24.

Theſe are ſome of thoſe moſt *powerful conſiderations* which may ſufficiently evince the *juſtice* and the *neceſſity* of our *Afflictions*; but the Royal Pſalmiſt in my *Text* preſents us with a further *argument*, even of their *goodneſs* too, in relation to thoſe manifold *advantages* which they bring to *Religion*. And that,

I. As they reſpect every *Individual*, and may be called *Perſonal Afflictions*.

II. As they reſpect a *Church* and *Nation*, and may be called *Publick Calamities*.

And first, as they respect every *Individual*, either the *Wicked* or the *Righteous*, being often found the *best expedients* to *convert* the *one* from their *vicious Habits*, to confirm and improve the *other* in their *course* of *Piety*.

And first; *Afflictions* are often found the *best Expedients* to convert the *wicked* from their *vicious Habits*.

* Porphyrius *in vita* Pythag.

It is reported of * *Pythagoras*, that he could tame *wild beasts* with the *Morality* of his *presence*, and suspend their *natural horror* with a *Precept*: but the commanding part of the world has long since lost this *secret* of *Restraint*, even in more proportionate objects: every *bold sinner* is become more Magical in his constitution, than that *hardned German Sennertus* writes of; his *obstinacy* has steel'd his very infirmities into *Armour*; so that the sharpest *reproofs* men dart at him, either *reflect*, or *drop short*, like a *charm'd Bullet*: if their *Invectives* are poignant and severe, he sets himself on his guard, and holds those sins the *closer* about him, with which he is *cover'd* as with a *garment*; if their *insinuations* are gentle, mild, and beseeching, they fall like the *Dew* on the *Rocks*, which onely serves to nourish those *Serpents* that inhabit them; for he makes their

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indearments but *forms* to offer up his *Lusts* in, and gathers *Courtship* from their *phrase*: Grant that he hears them * *gladly* for the *newness* of their Topic, or becomes * *almost* a Christian by the *terrour* of their Eloquence; yet will his next *disorder* so scatter those discourses, that they usually prove no more beneficial to him, than the quick moments of *Lightning* to a Traveller in the night, who before he advances one step forward, has lost his *direction*, and is only more *amazedly* relaps'd into his *former darkness*. * Mark 6. 20. * Acts 26. 28.

And how can it *naturally* be otherwise, when the whole system of his *thoughts* and *inclinations*, the great bent of his *nature* stands *contradictory* to Religion? how can *perswasions* work on a *petrify'd heart*, or the * *foolishness* of preaching reform the *chair* of the *scornful*? his daily *voluptuousness* corrupts his *natural Conscience*, extinguishes his *first Principles*, and afterwards draws a *thick vail* before his *understanding*: for whilst his *eyes* are caress'd with the visits and interviews of *beauty* and *dress*, his *Tympanum* dancing to the soft Vibrations, the delicate Modulations of *Harmony*; whilst his *Tongue* and Palate, with their exquisite Membranes, lye bath'd in all the variety of *Luxury*, and a studied Epicurism; his *Smell* incens'd with the * 1 Cor. 1. 21.

costly

coſtly ſacrifice of *Odours*, every return of breath bringing with it the Treaſures of *Arabia*: whilſt, I ſay, the buſie *Machin* is in this Tumult of *ſenſual Extaſie*, this Tyranny of delight, how deſart, how neglected muſt the Cells of *Reaſon* lye? In this Riot of the Senſes, how ſhall he attend to the *ſtill voice* of *Judgment* and *Conſcience*? Or how ſhall he perceive the little *ſpiritual appulſes* of *reflective* thoughts?

Such *Methods* are for the *Ingenious* and the Tractable, the humble and the relenting Sinner; but when either the powers of the Soul lye diſſolved in *Proſperity*, or *Contumacy* has skinn'd the Tumour, then can no other diſcipline prove effectual, than that which *ſacrifices* unto health, that which *ſtabs* the Impoſthume. Accordingly the Royal Pſalmiſt, having ſeriouſly conſidered the *blaſphemies* of the wicked, intreats the Lord to take their *Reformation* into his *own hands*, to ariſe with ſudden vengeance, and * *maintain* his *own cauſe*. An eminent example of this *proceeding*, we may read in the *Converſion* of St. *Paul*, *Acts* the ninth, who, whilſt he was *raging* throughout all the *Synagogues* of *Damaſcus*, and *breathing* out *ſlaughters* againſt the Diſci-

* Pſal. 74. 23.

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ples of our Lord, was *ſtruck down* into an *Apoſtle* by a voice from Heaven; had his *malice* purged away, by the *Lightning* that ſhone round him; and from his *blindneſs*, recover'd a moſt glorious *Illumination*: for as ſoon as his *ſcales* had dropt from his *eyes*, he from thenceforth beheld nothing but *Chriſt*, and him *crucified*.

And although we cannot promiſe that the Lord will appear to every *deſperate ſinner* in ſuch a *Miracle*, ſuch a *mercy* of *conſuming fire*; yet doubtleſs, before the *full meaſure* of their iniquity is *compleated*, there are never wanting to the wicked ſome ſuch *ſeaſons* of *Afflictions*, as may create in them *ſerious thoughts*, and furniſh their minds with a *true judgment* of things; and they are never permitted to * *ſleep on* till the whole *Agony* of *Divine goodneſs* is over. * Matth. 26. 45.

How conſpicuous was this *method* in the Antient *Excommunications*? when the ſinners were not only excluded from the *Service* and *Sacraments* of the Church, but were delivered over to the *buffetings* of *Satan*, to ſickneſſes and torments of Mind, to terrifying Dreams and horrid Illuſions: theſe were the *ſeverities* that reduced them to a *captivity of thought*, to poverty

ty of ſpirit, to their *whole years* of *proſtration*, and to the humbling of themſelves through all the *degrees of Penance*.

The *Obſtinate* and the *ſenſual* muſt have the Law *again* delivered to them in *darkneſs*, *Clouds*, and *dreadful Thunders*; and when the *terrours* of the Lord ſhall have *open'd* their ears to *diſcipline*, and ſet *ſcourges* over their hearts, then may the *ſtanding Miniſtry* take effect, and the *arts of perſwaſion* enter; for ſo we have read of a *deaf* perſon, who as eaſily perceived the leaſt *whiſper* of a voice whilſt a *drum* has beaten at his *ear*.

* Luke 16. 19.

That * *rich man* in the Goſpel (as we may probably gueſs from his *delicious fare*) ſcarce ever once *thought of Heaven*, till he lifted up his eyes in *Hell*; whereas, if he had received but a *ſmall portion* of thoſe *Torments* in his *life-time*, he might from hence have taken a *ſurer proſpect* of Heaven through a *leſs Chaſm*, and have diſcovered a place for *himſelf* in *Abraham's* boſome.

Thoſe *young Courtiers* of *Abdera*, who went diſtracted from the *Andromeda* of *Euripides*, ran raving about the Town a *whole Summer*, Acting and reciting in every corner of the Streets, with all the *Rabies* of the Play in their mouths;

and

and notwithſtanding there were made ſeveral applications for their *Recovery*, continued on their *frantick Jollity*, till the following *Winter* ſtarved their Poetick Fury, and cool'd them into *Common Senſe*.

A Bed of *Sickneſs* may *reform* that man, whom the *Law*, the *Prophets*, the *Goſpel*, nay, and *one riſen from the dead*, would never have *reclaimed*: for, when having danced through various Scenes of *falſe pleaſure*, and *wild mirth*, and drawing near to the *laſt Act* of that *Fable*, *Life*, his *Diſtemper* ſhall then chance to give him the *dreaded leiſure* of his thoughts, how quickly will the *Goſpel* break in upon his *retirement*, and ſet all its *contempts*, all its *prophanations* in array before him? how will his *Objections* againſt *Revelation* * then melt away, like the *Canaanites* before *Joſhua*; and his ſtrong *Scepticiſm* grow ſickly, and conſume at the victorious appearance of *Truth*? how different will his *Imaginations* then be, from thoſe that were the entertainment of his *hotter bravery*, when his Conſtitution was Athletick, and his Blood in all its boaſt and pride; when his *vital Sulphur* was ſtrong, and his *Pulſe* beat high within him; when in his proſperity he ſaid, That *Virtue* was a path

* Exod. 15. 15.

too *narrow* for the *Generous*, onely a beaten way for the loaded Ass; that *Deliberation* was the *cowardice* of thought, *Vice* the *exuberancy* of Parts, and *Piety* the *wisdom* of the Spleen? But lo, now the long-resisted notion of a *Deity* breaks out and *kindles* upon him, it even *haunts* and persecutes his reflections; 'tis about his paths and about his bed, and spies out all his ways: If his thoughts can * ascend into *Heaven*, it is there; if they go down into *Hell*, it is there also; if they take the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the *Sea*, even there they shall perceive the terrible works of the Lord, and his Wonders in the Deep; if peradventure *Darkness* covers him, yet behold, the Lord comes riding on that Cloud, and then even that Darkness will be day: now will his long-abused *Soul* grow Conscious of her *own Immortality*, and his Mind swell with *inward Argument*; 'twill be no more accounted a *vapour in the Nostrils*, or a *little spark* in the moving of the heart, but an eternal subject of *Glory* or *Confusion*: now let him tell me, if he can, how ravishing the *Psalms* of *David* are, beyond the *Odes* of *Pindar*, or the *Lunacy* of *Lucretius*; how venerable a plain

* Psal. 139. v. 8, 9, &c.

plain *Homily* appears, how full of *Sacred Apothegm*, how each Paragraph contains ſomewhat *Infinite* and *Immenſe*, and a *Canaan diſtils* from every *Text*!

Wherefore if now, even in *this his day*, he will be obedient to the vaſt infuſions of his *Converſion*; if he will conſtantly maintain the great Current of *Repentance* in its proper Channel, and with all *Sincerity* live up to the *vows of his Sickneſs*; then may he be *advanced* into my *Second part*, and be numbred amongſt the *Righteous*, where *Afflictions* are ſure to meet him again, though with *another face*; for as they are often found the *beſt expedients* to convert the *obſtinate* from their *vicious habits*, So,

Secondly, They do *confirm* and heighten the *Righteous* in their *courſe* of *Piety*.

He that conſiders the *ſlow progreſs* of *vertuous Habits*, the conſtant ſollicitations of the *World* without him, the continual Treacheries of his own *Nature* within, the ſecret and malicious Inſinuations of all the *Powers* of *Darkneſs* that are round him, will readily confeſs, That the frequent and moſt inſtant admoniſhments of *Afflictions*, are the beſt *Guards* againſt Vice, the ſureſt ſtrong Hold againſt all thoſe

Enemies; and that the *Implacable Canaanite* onely *defends* that Land, that *Iſrael* againſt which he *fights*.

We find *this ſtate* of *Afflictions* almoſt every where recommended by the *wiſer Heathens*; which did not proceed from any Oſtentation of Wit, was not any Rant of Stoiciſm, but the reſult and ſobriety of their *beſt Reaſoning*, and ſprang from the cooler Counſels of *Philoſophy*; conſonant to which, we meet with a moſt remarkable ſentence of *Plato*, in his * Republicks, whereby you would imagine that he *prophetically* deſcrib'd one of our *Primitive Martyrs*; where he ſays, *That to approve a man heartily righteous, he muſt be ſcourged, tortured, bound, have both his eyes burnt out; and in the cloſe, having ſuffered all evils, muſt be Impal'd or Crucify'd.*

* Plat. 2. *Repub.* Ὁ Δίκαιος μαστιγώσεται, &c.

Neither was it the *affectation* of the *retir'd*, or a melancholy Doctrine of the Cell, but grew a Maxime even amidſt the *Joftneſſes* of *Courts*, and gained the Suffrage of the *Noble* too: Let one inſtance out of many ſuffice, and that of *Philip* King of *Macedon*, concerning whom prophane Hiſtory relates, that having in one day ſucceeded in three notable Enterprizes, he immediately implored the gods, that they would be ſo propitious to him, as to *expiate* that

that immoderate proſperity with ſome *miſfortune*, and temper it into a draught fit for Mortality.

Moreover, what is more remarkable, 'twas chiefly from *this State*, that moſt of their eminent *Heroes* were Canoniz'd; for, after they had been broken and diſſipated here on earth by vaſt *Calamities*, then were they plac'd amongſt the *Stars*, and their mighty Souls *collected* into their aſſigned Orbs.

Even the ancient *Patriarchs* (who lived before the *Moſaic Inſtitution*) paſſed away their *numerous years* in *Sorrows* and *Pilgrimages*, *mighty Judgments*, or *Ægyptian ſlavery*: And about thoſe times (according to the beſt conjectures of Eccleſiaſtical Authors) the *righteous Job* flouriſhed in his *Afflictions*, and now remains to all poſterity, a ſtupendious example of Religion and Miſery.

Beſides, in the eſtabliſh'd œconomy of the *Jewiſh State*, (which though it vvas ſo full and pregnant of the happineſs of *this World*, that its *Political appearance* vvas nothing but the promiſe of a Temporal proſperity) yet vve find, that for the moſt part, amongſt the *Jews*, their *ſtouteſt Leaders*, beſt *Kings*, and nobleſt *Prophets*, were moſt ſeverely treated vvith *Croſſes* and ſharp *Afflictions*. And

And now, if the constancy, equanimity, and all the gallant worth of the best of *Heathens*, the Righteousness of the antient *Patriarchs*, the Valour, Wisdom, and Integrity of the more renowned *Jews*, have been signaliz'd and made conspicuous chiefly by their *Afflictions*; surely *Christianity*, which has plac'd *Immortality* in a *fuller light*, which has set an *exceeding glory* before us to animate our *Contentions* in *Tribulation*, and has given us an infallible assurance of that astonishment of Men and Angels, a *Crucify'd God*; ought in all natural reason to be productive of infinitely more *illustrious Effects* under its *severer dispensation*: especially if we consider, that there is not a *Vertue* proposed to our *Imitation* through the *whole life of our Saviour*, which has not for its appendage that which the Animal man calls *Misery*, although it proves, in the event, the onely winging of the Soul, the highest *exaltation* of *Humane Nature*, which had never been honoured with the *Union of God*, if it had not been in order to *suffer*.

But yet *Christianity* would be a strange *irrational* Doctrine, and as eagerly derided as the Stoical Apathy, if from its *Principles* and *Duties* we should endeavour to perswade men that

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that in *Afflictions* and Miſeries there was a *ſenſitive pleaſure*, or at leaſt no ſenſitive *regret*: Virtue and Piety do not charm us into a *Lethargy*, do not leſſen the Impreſſions of *Pain*, or the reſentments of *Injuries*; they rather improve them, by how much the *Temperate* and the *Intellectual* are more *keen* and exquiſite in all their *perceptions*, than the Senſual and Debauched; ſo that the true Chriſtian is altogether as ſenſible and as conſcious of the *Wounds* and *Indignities* offered to his Nature, as the Voluptuous and the Revengeful; but he bears them with an entire ſubmiſſion to the *Providence*, *Correction*, or *Tryal* of his Heavenly Father, not onely without Murmurings, but with Joy, * exceeding Joy, by reaſon of that *Proſpect* that is ſtill before him; a Proſpect, which ſhew's the *duration* of Miſery ſhort and vaniſhing, the *Recompence* of it immeaſurably great and Eternal. This was St. *Paul's comfort* in the midſt of his * *perils*, *fightings*, and *jeopardies*; of his *ſtripes*, *priſons*, and *deaths*: when he was a *Gladiator* in the world in the behalf of Chriſt, a Spectacle and * *Theatre* to Men and Angels. Even our bleſſed Saviour himſelf was pleaſed to ſuſtain his *ſuffering Humanity* with the full Confidence and Expectation of

* 2 Cor. 7. 4.

* 2 Cor. 11.

* 1 Cor. 4. 9.

* Heb. 12. 2. of the * *Joy* that was ſet before him; for then he *deſpiſed the ſhame*, and *endured the Croſs*, when he looked through the darkneſs of his Agony
* Eph. 1. 20, 21. and Crucifixion, and beheld his * *Glorification* above Principalities and Powers, his Exaltation at the right hand of God.

Afflictions are thoſe *ſtorms* that do fix and ſtrengthen our *Principles*, that ſettle and ſecure our *Fundamentals*; that faſten our *Religion*, not on the complacencies of our *Affections*, and the accidental deliciouſneſs of a *proſperous Piety*; but on ſtrong *reaſon*, deep conſideration, and an invincible *wiſdom* in *ſpiritual* concerns. On theſe *waves* are we *daſhed* the nearer Heaven, till our *Hope* and our *Faith* advance into *Hy-*
* Heb. 11. 1. *poſtaſis*, into the * *evidence* of things not ſeen. Theſe are the *two-edged ſwords*, the *ſharpneſſes* that perform the true *Anatomy* of the *Chriſtian*,
* Heb. 4. 12. that pierce and ſearch to the * *dividing of Soul and Spirit, joynts and marrow*, to the diſtinguiſhing of true *Piety* from *Temper*: for many ſpecious acts and offices in Religion, do oftentimes proceed more from *Conſtitution* than *Precept*; are not ſo much the certain effects of a ſteady *Judgment*, as the caſual efforts of a warm Imagination; as 'tis not *ſtrength* and *choice*, but *weakneſs* and *infirmity*, that makes a man

man *Run*, when he ſhould onely *Walk*; whereas, *Afflictions* prove us invincibly conſtant to our *Reſolutions*, and *purſuit* makes us cling to the *Horns* of the *Altar*.

Beſides, they are *Tryals* which *Hypocriſie* can never ſtand; they pluck off its *diſguiſe*, and make it quit the *Stage*; they ſhake and ruffle the man till they diſover a true *vital Devotion* from a *Mechanick Impulſe*; which, like the *motion* of a Paralytick, argues not *progreſſion*, but *diſeaſe*.

They give us an exquiſite *reliſh* of thoſe *Mercies* we do enjoy, wean our *Affections* from the *world*, prevent our *ſurfeits* of *proſperity*, and place us in a continual preparation for *Death*: Moreover, what is not ſo commonly inſiſted on, they enlarge our *Experience*, and give our *Faculties* a miraculous *perfection*. For, do but conſider what *excellent diſcourſes* are owing to the Pen of the *Mourners*? what Divine * *Conſolations* we have receiv'd from the damps and horrours of a Priſon? what * *conſtancy* and peace of mind from the incirclings of *War*? What *Meditation* from a *Martyr'd King*? as if mens *Underſtandings* had been purg'd and *refin'd* by their *Afflictions*, and their *Faculties* vex'd

* Boeth.

* Lipſius.

into *Intuition*: as 'tis obſerved of the more *Intellectual Platoniſts*, that by long *faſtings*, and frequent *ſeverities*, they raiſed themſelves unto thoſe *Abſtractions* and pure *Idea's*, which ſome men are not yet *Dieted* to apprehend: whereby they did in a manner reſemble thoſe *Prophets* of old, who receiv'd their *Inſpirations*, and delivered their *Oracles* in *Tortures*. Nay, perhaps the renowned *wiſdom* of *ancient* men is not ſo much extracted from long *obſervations* and repeated *experiences*, as from the Lectures of their *Gout* and *Stone*, as from thoſe *infirmities* which accompany their Age.

Neither do they give a *perfection* onely to mens *natural powers*, but more eſpecially an extraordinary *advancement* and *ſupereminency* to their *Spiritual Capacities*; making them * *partakers* of *Gods Holineſs*. It muſt be confeſs'd, that many have very *reſolutely* undergone great and formidable *Torments*, even *death* it ſelf, in its moſt cruel and vileſt circumſtances, out of falſe and unworthy *Principles*; ſuch as *Phanatick Obſtinacy*, *National Cuſtom*, *Secular Gallantry*, meer *Sullenneſs and Stupidity*, *blind and miſguided Zeal*, and what is more remarkable, even *Jeſuitical policy*: but theſe ſpurious and *equivocal examples* are ſo palpably diſcerned from thoſe *excellent*

* Heb. 12. 10.

cellent perſons who have *ſuffer'd* in the behalf of the Religion of the *Goſpel*, with *true Chriſtian meekneſs* and *patience*, that they need not in the leaſt diſturb our *preſent argument*: for had theſe falſe Martyrs that general conſpiration of *Graces*, which *Afflictions* always produce in the truly *Righteous*? did they manifeſt in their *demeanour* and *converſation* that *fruit* of the *Spirit* ſumm'd up *Gal.* 5. 22. *viz*, *love*, *joy*, *peace long-ſuffering*, *gentleneſs*, *goodneſs*, *faith*, *meekneſs*, and *temperance*? if ſo, they could never have been enemies to *Civil Government*; they could never have *ſcornfully* rejected the humble addreſſes of holy Confeſſours, and *good men*; have *wilfully* ſtifled the Evidences and convictions of *Truth*; have deſign'd and acted *barbarities*, contrary to all *natural juſtice*, *moral goodneſs*, and *heatheniſh civility*. No, the afflicted *righteous* man has no ſuch *concerns* upon *earth*; he leads a **life hid with Chriſt in God*, dwells in the Contemplations of *Heaven*, is exercis'd in pious *Raptures*, and incompaſs'd with the Miniſtry of *Angels*: his earneſt *Devotions* gather vigour and *accent* from the *acuteneſs* of his *pains*, from the *overwhelmings* of *an horrible dread*; whilſt he conſiders and knows, that all his *perſecutions* will ariſe into the *enlargements* of *future* * Col. 3. 3.

happineſs, and his *fiery tryals* be *purify'd* into a *glory* round his head.

Where would have been the *Annals* of the *Heroick*? Where would have been victories of *Faith* mention'd *Hebrews* the 11, if it had not been for *Swords*, *Tyrannies*, *wild beaſts*, for the numerous inventions of perſecuting *malice*? Hence have proceeded all thoſe Miracles of *patience*, *courage*, *humility*, *reſignation*; that *inſpired complacency* under *Torments*, ſuitable to what St. *Chryſoſtom* Rhetorically writes of the three Children in the Furnace, Ἐυρυχωρίας ἐν μέσῳ πυρὸς ἀπέλαυσαν, that is, they *expatiated* there with as gay a *freedom* and relaxation of mind, as they would, had they been on the *plains* of *Meſopotamia*, or walking in the *gardens in the Eaſt*.

No *Joy* like to that of the *Righteous* under the glory of his Tribulations: How dead and vapid are all the Blandiſhments of the world to him, who is exercis'd in *ſpiritual Agonies*; in the *Olympics* of the *Soul*? who when *Perſecution* ceaſes, can yet obtain for himſelf a *Crown of Martyrdom* by ſtrict *Abſtinencies*, holy *diſcipline*, and the rigours of *Mortification*? That even by *theſe methods* can compleatly conquer and make innocent that Triumvirate of *Afflictions*, *Poverty*, *Diſgrace*, and *Sickneſs*, which the world hath

hath dreſs'd in ſuch *frightfull repreſentations.*

For what reliſh can there be in the abundance of Riches to one, who has taſted the recollections of a *Religious Poverty*! who can be ſedate and divinely buſie amidſt the *peeviſhneſs* of Want, and with *Socrates* maintain a deep and *quiet Contemplation*, with a *Xantippe* at his ear? who conſiders, how *Poverty* is a ſtate ſo *tolerable*, that it has been courted and choſen by many perſons, before ever any particular Providence had pointed out the Neceſſity, or laid the conſtraint? A ſtate ſo *commendable*, that 'tis made one of the moſt ſolemn Vows of thoſe who at any time engage themſelves in a *Religious Order*; that it was always *recommended* by men who were beſt able to give a true judgment of things, and had dedicated their lives to Wiſdom and Philoſophy. But above all, that 'tis ſanctifi'd and made *Evangelical*, by the *Hiſtory* and *Example* of our *Bleſſed Saviour*, who has not ſpoken a much *harſher* thing in his *whole Goſpel*, than what relates to a *confidence* in riches and great abundance; allowing onely a * *bare poſſibility*, a poſſibility with God, *with whom all things are poſſible*, for the refuge and *ſalvation* of the wealthy: as it were, not receiving them within the *ordi-*

* Matth. 19. 26.

nary

nary extenſions of his love and tenderneſs, but referring them to the *omnipotence*, and *laſt reach* of his *mercy*.

What are the acclamations of *Fame*, or the obloquies of *Scorn* to him, who conſiders how intoxicating a *great Reputation* is, how apt to raiſe Tumours in the *imaginations* of the *beſt* of men, and to tincture their reflexions with pride and vain complacency? who calls to mind, that there is not uſually a more *precarious* thing on earth, than he who has been *nurſed* up with flatteries and applauſes, who has liv'd upon *publick breath*, and been the *Idol* of the admiring *multitude*; that ſuch an one is the *Creature* of every *Hyperbole*; that he may be transform'd and faſhion'd by every *modiſh Epithite*, and complemented into all the abſurdities of *opinion* and *action*: who ſadly reflects how the voluptuous and plauſible, with *Herod* in the **Acts*, are often panegyric'd to *Death* and *Hell*, by the officious *Blaſphemies* of the *Rabble*: who conſiders that an abuſed *Reputation* does often break more *illuſtriouſly* through a *cloud of Infamy*; and let whatever happen, yet a *Blot* on his *name* here, may give it a *fairer Character* in the *ſight of Angels*, and make it more *legible* in the *Book of Life*.

* 12. 22.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, it muſt be confeſs'd, that *Health* is an ineſtimable Bleſſing; that it was the chiefeſt of all *Temporal Promiſes* in the *Old Teſtament*, without which no *other* could have been *enjoyed*. But yet if we conſider what *nouriſhment* and fewel it often adminiſters to the *groſſeſt ſenſualities*, what dangerous *temptations* lie in the *boſome* of the *healthful* continually preſſing for admiſſion, and how greedily they are many times entertained by thoſe who are *ſtrong* to undergo the *labours of iniquity*; we ſhall be apt to acknowledge, that *ſickneſs* is a proper *ſeaſon* for the *exerciſe* and *acquiſition* of many *graces*, or at leaſt that 'tis a *happy impotence*, in reſpect of the moſt *waſting vices* we are ſubject to; that a *firm conſtitution* of *mind* is often wrought from the *diſeaſes* of the *Body*, and the *Soul* grows more *active* and *refin'd*, by ſtill working out its *own ſeparation*; that the *mortal part* of us, by a continual ſucceſſion of *little diſſolutions*, may be better prepar'd to drop with eaſe, and juſt maturity, into that *final one* of *death*; which, when it meets a man in the full Tyde of his *proſperity*, and the luxury of his *Temper*, with what *confuſions* it aſſaults his Triumphant mind, with what *violence* it rends his ſtrong ligaments of *Life*? No one will more readily

part

part with his *earthly Tabernacle*, than he that by *indiſpoſitions* and long *ſickneſſes*, has been taught the trouble of keeping it *Tenantable*; he will rejoyce to ſleep with his Fathers, to be eaſed of the *ruines* of *Adam*, the *diſhonours* of *Original ſin*, and to reſigne up his *duſt and aſhes* for *Immortality*, and a *glorious form*.

Thus we have ſeen by what *gracious* arts, ſtrengths, and aſſiſtances, *Afflictions* may not onely be *patiently* born by the *Religious*, but alſo improv'd into *real comforts*, and heightned into all *natural* and *ſpiritual advantages*; and this may be done, not onely by perſons in their *private concerns*, but alſo in their *relative* and *publick capacities*, and as they conſtitute a *Church* or *Nation*: which brings me to my *ſecond General*, viz.

II. Briefly to *conſider what advantage Afflictions bring to Religion, as they reſpect a Church or Nation.*

Thoſe narrow Reaſoners, who, meaſuring *Divine Providence* by the modes of *humane inſpection*, thought it *trivial* and *perplexing* for it to direct every *Ordinary Agent*, and to mingle its *concourſe* with *particulars*, have notwithſtanding been very generous and liberal, in allowing a conſtant and ample ſuperintendency over

Churches

Churches and *Nations*: and that there might be nothing wanting to the *magnificence* of *Providence* in their Government, have ſuper-added peculiar *Stars* and *Angels* for ſubordinate miniſtrations. What appropriate Schemes of Government God Almighty is pleas'd to eſtabliſh to himſelf in his preſiding over thoſe *greater Bodies*, is no mans Province to inquire, nor within his capacity to declare; but however, this we may be certain of, and it has been confirm'd by the experience of all Ages, that *ordinarily Nations* may expect their *proſperous* or their adverſe *ſeaſons*, according as their *Virtues* or their *Vices* ſhall exceed.

And although *proſperity* be the Vote of Nature, the thirſt and inſtinct of the Soul, inſomuch that *Iſaiah* brings in the *Jews* begging a *kind couſenage* from their Prophets, * *Speak unto us ſmooth things, propheſie deceits*; Torment us no longer with your *Deſolations* and *Captivities*, thoſe prodigies of a diſtemper'd ſleep, but let your *Dreams* be a *continued Pageantry of Heaven*, and all your *Viſions* a *Shechinah*: I ſay, although this be the univerſal voice of Mankind, and that with the *Iſraelites*, we luſt for a *Canaan* in the very *wilderneſs*, are calling for new *luxuries* of *mercy*, whilſt we are deſpiſing

* Eſay. c. 30. v. 10.

the former; yet the Lord *graciouſly* hears our Prayers, and grants us a *denial*; knowing, that in plenty and eaſe, we are apt to forget our Maker; but when he *ſmites* us, we *turn back*, we *ſeek* him, we *inquire* of him? we publiſh *Faſts by Law*, transfer our *Policies* into *Piety*, and make the depths of *Empire* ſerve *Religion*: even ſo the appearance of a *Comet* improves *Aſtronomy*, better than all the *ordinary* motions of the *Stars* and *Planets*; and the *Sun* invites more eyes towards *Heaven* by its *Eclipſe*, than by its *conſtant ſplendour*.

The certain viciſſitude of *ſins* and *judgments*, *mercies* and *provocations*, hath in a manner render'd all *Church-Hiſtory* but *Repetition* and *Tautology*: Thus God dealt with the *ancient Jews*, thus with the *firſt Chriſtians*, and ſo he continues to *deal with us*: and although we cannot without deteſtation and amazement recall thoſe * *numerous ingratitudes* of *Iſrael*, committed within the ſpace of *forty* or *fifty years*; yet if we reflect on our own *Chronicle*, within near the ſame circuit of time, we ſhall be apt to conclude the *Jews* but *puny ſinners*, as the *horrour* of *Regicide* ſeems to leſſen the *guilt* of *Murder*: for did not the *memories* and obligations of our Fathers, immediately *cool* upon almoſt

* Pſal. 106.

as

as great a *deliverance*, as the *Miracle* of the *Red-ſea*? and did not we within a while after *murmur* and *rebel* againſt *Moſes* and *Aaron*, the beſt *Monarchy*, and the beſt *Hierarchy*? and in that *Interregnum*, when our King was but gone into the *midſt of the Cloud*, to learn *Afflictions*, and to *commune* with *the Lord*; did not ſome of us ſet up a *Calf* in *Horeb*, and *worſhip* that *molten Image*? when we were brought into the *promiſed Country*, σὺν χειρὶ κραταιᾷ καὶ, with the *ſecret*, but moſt *powerful hand of Providence*, did we not run *after the Counſels of Balac*, and *commit Whoredom with the Daughters of Moab*? and has not the Lord *viſited* for this *too*, with as great a *Plague*? and, having now a while enjoyed the *lots* nnd *diviſions* of our *Inheritance*, are not ſome amongſt us *erecting Altars* on *high places*, ſerving *Baal* and *Aſhtaroth*, and returning to the antient *Idolatry* of the *Land*? Theſe are our *parallel provocations* with *Iſrael*, and ſhall not our *judgments* be *greater*? even in this our *Land*, our *ſins* are become our ſevereſt *Executioners*; for do not *Hereſie* and *Schiſm*, *prophaneneſs* and *hypocriſie*, like the *four winds* in the deſcription of a *Tempeſt*, *blow all together*! inſomuch, that we may paint *our Church*, like the *Planetary figure*, with a *dart* in every *limb*; for its *whole body* now ap-

pears onely a *larger conſtellation of Wounds.*

Wherefore now is the proper and *advantageous ſeaſon* nobly to maintain the *Purity* of our *Faith*, and to defend the *wiſdom* of our *Diſcipline*, to lay aſide all peeviſh *Principles*, and *ſullen Separations*; to *conſpire* in nothing but *mutual Charity* and *publick Love*; to heighten our *Devotions* by *numbers* and *ardency*; to encompaſs and beſiege the *mercy-ſeat* of Heaven with importunity and *holy violence.*

Now let our *witty Gallants* leave off their fooliſh *Jeſtings*, and irrational *Scepticiſm*, their *cuſtomary*, if not *malicious levity* in *Sacred* things; and with their *ſolid Anceſtors*, grow wiſe and ſevere in their *Converſation*, faithful and friendly in their *ordinary dealings*, generous and brave in their *publick Actions*, manly and ſolemn in their *Religious Duties.* Let our *Magiſtrates* aſſume an *Heroical ſpirit*, and *dare* to be *righteous* where the *wicked proſper*; let them with *wiſdom*, *integrity*, and *zeal*, execute Juſtice and *Judgment* in this our Land, and then the *Lord* will *withdraw his*: for who can tell but that the *courageous* and *fervent Magiſtrate*, like

* Pſal. 106. v. 30. * *Phinehas* amongſt the *Jews*, may even *now* remove a *National Calamity* with his *Javelin*, with his *ſpeedy* and *zealous* execution? Let

our

our *Princes* be cloathed with *Sackcloth*, and for a while make their *Thrones* in the *duſt*: Let our *Prieſts* be deck'd with *Righteouſneſs*, *Courage*, and the *preparations* of *Martyrdom*; let them rejoyce to be made an *Anathema* for our *Church*, and to *bleſs* our *Nation* through the midſt of their *flames*.

And now to ſum up all our fore going diſcourſe as briefly as we can.

I. Let the bold and *proſperous ſinner*, who after many *Afflicting Calls* to Repentance, continues ſtill to ſin on with an *high hand*, let him with fear and trembling conclude, that his *Impunity* now proceeds from Gods *greateſt vengeance*, and the not *Afflicting* of him any more, from the very *fury* of his *wrath* and *indignation*; as thoſe Arrows flie *ſwifteſt* vvhich flie *inviſible*, and vve often *miſs* the *blow*, by the *exceſs* of anger. Let the obſtinate Atheiſt, who vvill not be reform'd by *preſent judgments*, but even after *melting* becomes nothing but *droſs*; that *asks who the Lord is*; after ſo many *plagues* of *Conviction*, let him knovv, that he vvants but *few degrees* of being reduc'd unto the utmoſt *Analyſis* of *hardning*, of being *conſummated* into the *conſtitution* of the *damn'd*, the *eternal glaſs of Hell-fire*.

II.

II. Let the *Afflicted righteous man rejoyce*, that his *infirmities* explore the ſtrengths of Heaven; that by his *Tryals* is manifeſted the Victory of *Faith*, the *omnipotence* of *grace*. That 'tis the * *buſineſs of Afflictions to create in him a due conſideration, hearty contrition, ſtrong cryes, increaſe of reverence*, and *the inlargements of Piety*.

* τῆς θλίψεως ἡ φύσις. S. Chriſ.

III. And let us of this *Church and Nation* conſider, that as we certainly are (and without *oſtentation* or any *ſecular intereſt* be it ſpoken) the moſt *perfect*, and the *ſincereſt part* of the *Catholick Church* now *exiſtent*, ſo we truſt that 'tis the *particular indulgence* of Almighty God to keep us up to this our *refinement*, by *conſtant perſecutions*: to correct and abate our *perſonal defects*, but to confirm and make our *Doctrines* more *Illuſtrious*, by the implacable oppoſitions of *Phanatick* rage, and *Jeſuitical malice*: and if we farther reflect on that unparallel'd *wiſdom*, *learning*, and *moderation*; that moſt rational and ſubſtantial *Piety*, *Charity*, and *Devotion*, which integrate the *conſtitution* of our *Church*, we ſhall be ready to acknowledg it highly expedient, that, with *St. Paul*, we ſhould have a *Thorn* in *the fleſh*, and be often under the *buffetings of Satan*, the *deſigns* and *attempts* of unreaſonable and malicious adverſaries;

ſaries; leſt we ſhould be *exalted above meaſure with our ſuper-eminency* of Doctrine; leſt we ſhould be *puff'd up* * τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν Ἀποκαλύψεων, *with our abundance of Revelation.* * 2 Cor. 12. 7.

And let our *Enemies* now deſtroy our *City*, let them burn down our *Temples*; if we cannot ſing Praiſes under their *Roofs*, we will Repent under their *Aſhes*; we will meet in Dens and Caves of the Earth, and by thoſe obſcurities, thoſe ſtealths of Worſhip, render our Religion more *Apoſtolical*, more *Primitive*. Yet will we ſet our *Moſes in the gap*, to ſee if peradventure the Lord too will *Repent*, and turn away his *Diſpleaſure* from us; to this end we will humble and proſtrate our ſelves, grow Pioneers in *Devotion*, and countermine them with our Prayers; and ſhould the *Deſtroying Angel* be already come forth, ſhould Judgments be already commiſſion'd for our Ruine, yet will we pray againſt *Decree*, againſt *Predeſtination* it ſelf; and * *Lord, if it be poſſible, let this Cup paſs from us!* * Mat. 26. 39.

FINIS.